1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

Ovimbundu and their neighbours. I have no tables representative of the Umbundu-speaking *diaspora* at the coast and in other outlying regions. There is an interesting and significant article in *Africa*[1] on those of these *diaspora* which are settled in the Mossamedes–Lubango area. The author has done all that could be expected within the limits of an article necessarily short, and it is to be hoped that subsequent writings may clear up matters left in doubt, especially with regard to the present social structure of the groups described.[2]

The social structure described in this chapter is that of the main body of the Ovimbundu. I may say that from observations and from a study of the genealogical tables collected, I have concluded that the structure of kinship and of social life is fairly homogeneous throughout the several tribes.

The Tribe

A complete enumeration of the Umbundu-speaking tribes or kingdoms with descriptions of their reciprocal relations is included in Chapter XII. Almost half of the twenty-two kingdoms were generally tributaries of one of the larger or more powerful kings, so that for practical purposes the Ovimbundu may be divided into eight or ten tribal groups. Although more than half of the Umbundu kingdoms may be said to be feudatories of the larger ones, it is nevertheless true that each of them had its own separate

[1] C. Estermann, 'Coutumes des Mbali du Sud d'Angola', *Africa*, Jan. 1939, pp. 74–86. The author states that their language is Kimbundu (of Luanda-Malange), but the examples which he gives show that although there are words borrowed from Kimbundu, from Portuguese, and from other sources, the structure both of verbs and of nouns and the method of 'Bantuization' of Portuguese words belong to Umbundu. These people may declare their language to be 'Kimbundu' in imitation of the European usage. So did the native 'Mohongo' taken to Paris by the Mission Rohan-Chabot (*Angola et Rhodesie*, Paris, 1914). I have personally ascertained that Umbundu is commonly spoken in Mossamedes and may also say that the samples of the language given in this article show it to be much the same as that spoken in the cities of Benguela, Lobito, &c. It would be better if an orthography more nearly like that recommended by the International African Institute were used. The term 'Mbali' (va Mbali, Mambari, Ovimbali) is an Umbundu term used for nearly one hundred years to designate those who imitate the Europeans or who live at or near the European towns which are collectively designated by the cognate term—*Lupali*. (For 'Mambari', &c., *vide* Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, pp. 91 f., 371, 384, &c.)

[2] e.g., who is the '*tante* de la jeune mariée ou la "marraine" des noces'? (*op. cit.*, p. 78).

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

631 life and each could be taken as a unit complete in itself. Individual studies and comparisons of one with another would provide much valuable material. Familiarity with individuals and groups belonging [184] to all the major tribal groups, and study of their folk-lore and customs has led me to conclude that as in language, so in social structure and in culture, the differences are of small account. In offering illustrative material, I shall give its tribal source.

The King

643 To describe the royal office and functions it would be necessary 177 to use the past tense. That reason, along with others, leads me to exclude this subject from the present study. Effective European occupation of the country and government by direct rule[1] have atrophied the royal office among the Ovimbundu until to-day kings survive as hardly more than living museum pieces. This being the case, I shall only enumerate the royal functions, very briefly characterize them, and pass on to describe other and living parts of the Umbundu social organism.

643 The principal functions of the royal office were:

776 1. *Religious.* The spirits of the king's ancestors were the principal national deities. The king was not only high priest but also the visible vice-regent and incarnation of the spirits. The [778] sacrifices at the royal shrine, *kakokoto* (literally, at the skulls), the place of the royal skulls, were for the nation in order:

643 (*a*) *To control the elements*, i.e. to ensure a sufficient supply of 372 rain and avoid the dangers caused by hail, by lightning, &c. Also to control fire by providing a new fire properly (ceremonially) 789 kindled from which everyone took his fire. A king's reign was spoken of as 'during the Water of Lord So-and-so' (*Kovava a Ñalã Ngandi*), or 'during the Fire of Lord So-and-so' (*Kondalu ya Ñalã Ngandi*).

241 (*b*) *To ensure fertility*, toward which desideratum the royal 644 marriage had great influence. The queen's special province was agriculture and her kitchen was sanctified by human sacrifice to [782] guarantee the national food supply. Ceremonially treated seed was distributed to be mixed with the seed of each granary.

[1] 'Direct rule' is applied in most parts of Africa where European settlement is the predominant consideration and also where centralized government is the ideal. 'Indirect rule' is best illustrated in the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanganyika Territory.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

182 621 in a somewhat decadent state, the Umbundu village has up to the present maintained its status as a local kinship unit.

182 592 602 The household is not a solitary unit but a part of the village. Since it is constituted by marriage, it embodies the union of at least two kinship groups. The attitudes and behaviour patterns within the Umbundu household are basically those universally recognized. In common with the households of most Bantu cultures, it differs from the European model in that it extends its attitudes and behaviour patterns to the wider kinship groupings by means of a classificatory system of relationship.

613 182 In the wider kinship groupings (*epata*), the Ovimbundu recognize both the maternal (*oluina*) and the paternal (*oluse*) lines of descent. The functions of the latter have been largely local, residential, social, and religious, with succession (of status) in the male line. The function of the former has been cohesive over a larger territory, with a recognized head in whom has been vested both religious and economic functions. Both his office and the inheritance of property descend in the female line. Much of the power, economic and personal, formerly held by the *oluina*, in the person of the mother's brother, seems to be passing at the present time to the *oluse*, in the person of the father. The bilineal kinship system has been a strongly cohesive social force.

182 [582] The form of marriage practised by the Ovimbundu is of the two-way cross-cousin type in both lines of kin and in three generations. It seems to be an individual type developed in the particular social and economic situation of the Ovimbundu. As a contract between two families and as a new venture, the marriage relation demands that great attention be given to attitudes and behaviour patterns which emphasize mutual respect.

[561] The hierarchy of age is a very real factor in the Umbundu social structure. Age-set 'schools' have not existed generally throughout the tribes, but there are associations of coevals. This is largely a cohesive force.

754 Sorcery is the most important disruptive force at work *within* Umbundu society. Working as it does, within kinship groups, and inasmuch as it seems to be on the increase, sorcery embodies a real danger to social cohesion.

184 178 Homogeneity has never been an attribute of the Ovimbundu as regards their racial or cultural make-up. The slave-trade injected other and more diverse elements, and recent movements and

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contacts still other. As regards social and economic status, the course of Umbundu life has seen great changes: great inequalities produced by trade booms; a severe levelling down by effective European occupation and by the application of direct rule. That the Umbundu social organism through this entire process has maintained elements of cohesion and of life speaks well for its adaptability and for the vitality of its institutions.

VIII. LANGUAGE

Affinities of Umbundu

197 The Umbundu language is widely understood in Angola owing to the journeys of the Ovimbundu as raiders and traders in large caravans. Umbundu is as important for communication in Angola as Hausa is for Nigeria, or Swahili for the east coast of Africa.

Notwithstanding this use of Umbundu as a lingua franca it is necessary to note that tribes surrounding the Ovimbundu have their own distinctive Bantu languages; moreover, the Umbundu language itself has several dialects.

For example, the Vasele tribe living in rugged country in the hinterland of Novo Redondo have a dialect of Umbundu (Usele) so distinctive that a competent Ocimbundu interpreter has difficulty in making himself understood, or interpreting what is said. Isolation of the Vasele from the Ovimbundu has led to the formation of a cultural pocket in which linguistic developments have shared in [184] a specialization of culture. The differences between the Umbundu of Elende and that of the Ambundu tribes may be noted by comparing this brief outline of Umbundu, recorded at Elende, with the records of Amandus Johnson, whose research relates to the language spoken in the hinterland of Loanda. The present chapter will deal only with notes on vocabulary, phonetics, an outline of grammar, sign language, folklore and proverbs, all of which are briefly treated. In the field phonographic records of the Umbundu language were taken, and for the analysis of tonal values and other aspects of phonetics I am indebted to Dr. M. H. Watkins, a student of Professor E. Sapir, formerly of the University of Chicago, now at Yale.

The section on Umbundu grammar conclusively shows Umbundu to be a representative language of the Bantu family of languages. Umbundu possesses all the fundamental characteristics of Bantu [113] speech. The truth of this may be seen by comparing this outline of Umbundu with the analysis of Bantu languages given by A. Werner (Language Families of Africa, London, 1925). Moreover, Carl Meinhof (Grundzüge einer vergleichenden Grammatik der Bantu Sprachen, Berlin, 1906, pp. 112-115, and translation by A. Werner and N. J. von Warmelo, London, 1932) indicates the degree of relationship of Umbundu to other Bantu tongues by giving comparisons of the stems of personal and possessive pronouns, along with other comparative data.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ovimbundu[1] of central Angola appear under various names[2] in narratives by nineteenth and early twentieth century travellers in West Central Africa. In the present century three anthropological studies have been written about them by Childs,[3] Hambly,[4] and Hastings,[5] as well as two shorter studies by Bastos[6] and Santos Brandao,[7] and a large number of articles.[8] Despite the large amount of documentation available there existed a considerable number of gaps, especially as regards the political system and the kinship system.[9] In proposing to work among the Ovimbundu, I hoped to be able to fill in these gaps, and in particular to provide a study of what appeared to be a double-descent kinship system. I also hoped to study the reactions of an African society to Portuguese rule.

I arrived at Nova Lisboa in roughly the centre of Umbundu country in October 1955. Here, as in Lisbon, I was told that it would be very difficult to find an area where the traditional social life of the Ovimbundu as described in the literature

[1] A plural from the singular Otjimbundu. The adjective and the name of the language is Umbundu. The Ovimbundu people are entirely distinct from the Kimbundu people of northern Angola and the two languages are not mutually intelligible. However, the confusion between the two has gone so far that both Europeans and Africans speak of the Ovimbundu people and language as Kimbundu and of the true Kimbundu as Kamundongo.

[2] Mambari, Nano, Ovimbali, and so on.

[3] G. M. Childs, *Umbundu Kinship and Character*, Oxford, 1949.

[4] W. D. Hambly, *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1934.

[5] *Ovimbundu Customs and Practices* (unpublished thesis) 1933, D. A. Hastings.

[6] Traçaos Geraes sobre a Etnografia do Districto de Benguella in *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, 1908, pp. 5–13, 44–56, 81–99, 135–40, 169–76, 197–207.

[7] Articles in *Mensário Administrativo* (Luanda) March–April, July–August 1950, and Sept.–Oct., Nov.–Dec. 1952.

[8] See Bibliography.

[9] For an examination of the ethnographic material as it then was, see Merran McCulloch, *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa. International African Institute, London, 1952.

[p. xiv is blank – Analyst]

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114 121 184 [162] could be observed. Eventually I decided to work in the Bimbe area, in the extreme north-western corner of Umbundu country. The census[10] indicated that Bimbe had a smaller white population than any comparable area of Umbundu country, and people who knew it considered that it was one of the areas most likely to retain a relatively conservative social life.

114 121 184 101 In Bimbe I settled in the village of Epalanga in the chiefdom of Gumba. The advantage of Gumba lay in the conservatism for which its people were noted in other chiefdoms; its disadvantage lay in its proximity to the northern boundary of Umbundu speech and culture, which led me to collect some items of ethnographic information not typical of Umbundu country.[11] On the whole, I am satisfied that the people of Gumba were in the past as in the present Ovimbundu in both speech and way of life.[12]

121 Many of my discoveries were at first negative ones. I could not find any evidence that there was a double system of kinship groups actually in existence; the villages were not composed of agnatic kin; the chief seemed lacking in power. Nor was it easy to obtain detailed information about the past even from old men. There is little interest nowadays in history, nor are the old social institutions regarded, even by those who once participated in them, as being necessarily better than those of the present day. The reason for this attitude seems to lie in Umbundu social psychology with its readiness to accept European authority and values. Interesting as the motivations behind this attitude are, this 'cultural amnesia' caused me much disappointment. I found it much easier to get texts on the caravan trade, and on ceremonial practices and proverbs, than on the political and kinship systems. The inadequacies of the information I received on the political system may be explained by the fact that Gumba is on the fringe of the area tributary to the old kingdom of

181 121

[10] Of 1950.

[11] The payment of fines by a man to his dead wife's kin had been formerly practised in Gumba, and still is further north. It does not seem to have been known in living memory elsewhere in Umbundu country. [602]

[12] The northern limit of Umbundu speech is now somewhere to the north of the administrative post of Cela. As there has not been substantial migration from the south, it is reasonable to assume that it is many years since the Gumba–Cela boundary was also the language boundary.

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journeys diminished in distance as they increased in profitability.[53]

My informants, however, gave a somewhat different picture. Long trading journeys were still being undertaken in the last decade of the trade (1901–11). Some men whom I met had travelled to the kingdom of the Mwata Yamvo and beyond to Luba country; one man had made a journey into what is now the Congo Republic which took a year to go and a year to return; another had visited Barotseland. It should be said that these seem to have been unusually long journeys; journeys totalling six to eight months were common.[54]

The significance of the trade in social life is reflected in the mystical explanations of success in business found in Umbundu religion. Prosperity might be explained either by the favour of spirits such as Kandundu and Otjipuku, who received at their shrines libations of wine, or by malevolent sorcery involving the sacrifice of relatives in exchange for wealth.[55] The existence of these two explanations probably reflects the existence of some rich men who satisfied the expectations of their relatives and others who did not.[56]

Apart from the rubber trade, the older slave trade continued until its vigorous suppression in the period 1910–12, and indeed seems, as regards the Ovimbundu, to have become intensified in the period after 1890. The slaves went to S. Tome and Principe, or to coastal plantations. Up to that time the Ovimbundu had sold few of their own people, with the exception of criminals or people who had become generally unpopular with their kin. The collapse of the old political system played into the hands of adventurers who unscrupulously exploited the Umbundu custom of debt slavery or conducted raids for this purpose.[57]

It was then the 'trade' which was the common factor in the life of all Ovimbundu, and which was so to speak the factor,

[53] Childs, p. 208.

[54] Informants.

[55] Although some old men still have shrines to the luck-giving spirits it is not possible to see how their cult functioned in the social structure then existing. It is, however, notable that success could be interpreted mystically in two ways by benevolent spirits or by sorcery.

[56] Childs, p. 213. I was told that Gumba had been raided from Bailundo.

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rather than any political alliance or opposition, which related the Ovimbundu as a whole to the Portuguese and the other tribes. Informants who remember 'the time of the rubber' talk about it with much more interest and much more detail than about any other aspect of the past, and it is far easier to make an ordered picture out of the narratives of the caravan journeys than to fill in the gaps in the descriptions of the political and kinship systems provided by Childs and Hastings.[57]

Politically the Ovimbundu were divided, as has been said, into several kingdoms. Bailundo, the largest of the kingdoms was divided, according to Childs into about 200 sub-chiefdoms. As it had about half a million inhabitants this would give an average population of about 2,500. While the kingdoms seem to have been more or less stable in number and boundaries from the end of the eighteenth century, the number of sub-chiefdoms seems to have increased. Thus an official Portuguese estimate made in 1799 gives Bailundo as having only 82 sub-chiefdoms, and Galangue, where Childs counted 112 sub-chiefdoms, as having 78. The sub-chiefdom paid tribute to the king, sent men for his armies, and recognized his court as the supreme arbitrator. Some sub-chiefdoms were held by ministers or relatives of the king.[58]

It is, however, not easy on the sparse detail available to decide how much autonomy the sub-chiefdoms really had. Gumba, the area where I worked, was a sub-chiefdom of the Bailundo kingdom, albeit on the north-western frontier, neighbouring Cassongue and Cela, where the people did not call themselves Va-Mbailundu, though their rulers acknowledged the suzerainty of the king of Bailundo. Old men told me of raids from Bailundo for slaves, but I cannot say if this was the result of the period of disorder mentioned, or whether sub-chiefdoms on the border of a kingdom gave only nominal submission and received only nominal protection. In the area where I worked,

[57] This is not intended as a personal reflection on Dr. Childs and the late Dr. Hastings, both of whom deserve the highest praise for their work and for their obvious devotion to the Ovimbundu. Hastings devoted far more space to the magico-religious field than to the kinship system. Likewise Childs's description of kinship is much shorter, much less detailed, and much less satisfactory than his account of childhood and adolescence, or the really outstanding historical chapter.

[58] Magyar, pp. 385–92; Childs, pp. 23–24.

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meet other Angolan Protestants through such occasions as the Congress of Evangelical Youth, held at Malange in 1955.

While the Catholic missions are not tied to the Ovimbundu in the same way as the Protestants the number of their adherents falls sharply when the Umbundu boundary is reached. Responsiveness to missionary activity is a mark of the Ovimbundu today just as was participation in the caravan trade. Indeed, the main common possession of the Ovimbundu, the Umbundu language, is, as a literary vehicle and object of study, almost a missionary monopoly. Both missions produce a monthly magazine in Umbundu and Portuguese, and several books of a religious or educational nature have been published with Umbundu on one side and Portuguese on the other as legally required. The dictionaries and grammars are almost all of missionary authorship.

Acceptance of Christianity has also significance for Umbundu self-consciousness. The majority of Ovimbundu have come under missionary influence in varying degrees, and conversion to Christianity makes Ovimbundu feel closer to Europeans and superior to other African peoples. I have heard African priests claim that the Ovimbundu are the best people in Angola, largely on this ground, and at Lobito and Luanda tensions have been felt in the Protestant community between Ovimbundu and members of other tribes.[11]

The Ovimbundu live under economic, political, and religious systems introduced and controlled by Europeans. Yet trader, official, and missionary are all dependent on the Ovimbundu. The 'civilized' and the native live in symbiosis, and the two basic problems of this study are the nature of this symbiosis, and its relation to the social system of the native population themselves. To see this symbiosis in perspective it is necessary to describe what occupations and statuses Africans can hold.

The strict segregation of black and white found in South Africa is alien to Portuguese traditions. There is a lack of almost all forms of public segregation between white and non-white.[12]

[11] Personal information.

[12] In the racial discrimination that does exist the mulattoes generally count as whites. It is said to be difficult for a full African to obtain accommodation in a Luanda hotel, but the situation for mulattoes is quite different.

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catechist or missionary for support at the post. There is no tendency to confine government appointments to chiefdoms and headmanships to Catholics.[8] However, the Protestant catechists are, unlike the Catholic catechists, not exempt from taxes.[9]

The Ovimbundu no longer possess a coherent political system of their own. They cannot, owing to the nature of their relations with the post and their ignorance of the higher administration, regard the Government as being their representative; the only wide-range systems with which they can identify themselves are the missions. It is through them that the individual is promised eternal life, that the village receives a new type of identity and unity, and that the Ovimbundu as a people participate with the 'civilized' population in ritual communities cutting across the boundaries of culture and geography.

The objection may be made that it is only the Christians who could effectively be represented by the missions and that in Epalanga and Gumba generally baptized Christians formed a minority. It has, however, been previously noted how the school may give its name to a village of mixed population. The catechist will represent both Christians and pagans when he is concerned with the post or with the mission. Moreover, the percentage of pagans in Gumba is far higher than in the rest of Bimbe to which they are linked by the Umbundu language and culture, by administrative divisions, and by a wide range of personal contacts.

It may, then, be asserted, that the catechetical schools and the wider groupings which they build up are the social groups most significant for Umbundu integration on any scale wider than that of the household.

[8] In Gumba the chief and government headman were pagan. There are government-recognised Protestant chiefs elsewhere in Umbundu country.

[9] In some parts of Angola the Catholic catechists are not automatically granted exemption but have to have obtained certain other qualifications, e.g. a certain degree of literacy.

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with Adolfo, the small son of Jaime, his wife's brother, but when asked what relation Adolfo was to him, became confused and said, 'My son, my sister's son.'

There exist marked variations in terminology in Umbundu country.[16] For instance, *sekulu* seems to be used for mother's brother only in north-western Umbundu country. Elsewhere *manu*[17] is used for mother's brother, and *sekulu* is used for grandfather. At Caconda, where there has been strong Portuguese influence since the eighteenth century, only the Portuguese kinship terms are known.[18]

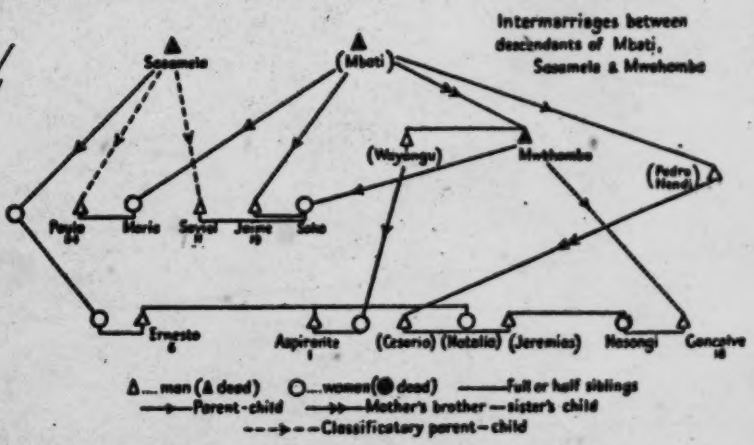

CHART 2. Mbati, Mwehombo and some of their kin. For Mbati (dead, non-member) and Mwehombo (dead, former member) see Chapter III, section 1. For Sasamela (dead, former member) and Cesario, Jeremias, Natalia, Pedro Nendi, and Wayangu (all living non-members) see List II (pp. 55–6). The rest of the individuals named on the chart are members of Epalanga. Paulo and Saviel were 'brothers', both patrilaterally and matrilaterally.

3. *Kinship Norms*

In this section I shall describe the relations that existed within the elementary family in the time of the rubber trade. A man

[16] For other lists of kinship terms see Hastings, pp. 83–85. Childs, pp. 47–56. M. Howse, *Umbundu Lessons* (Dondi, 1933), Vol. II, pp. 195–7.
[17] Etymologically, *manu* seems to mean 'mother-person'.
[18] Private information.

[Text continues on p. 98]

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man has four daughters he will receive the bridewealth only for the two oldest. The mother's brother will receive the bridewealth for the third sister and a brother for the fourth. If the father is dead, the payment is made to a mother's brother or a brother real or classificatory. To some extent the size of the bridewealth is a reflection of the status of the girl—thus on the railway line 1,000 escudos (£12. 10s.) might be paid for a girl who could read and write. In my own area a Gumba man might pay more for a girl from Ndjandju than for a Cela girl because Ndjandju is regarded, owing to its proximity to the mission, as being more civilized. There exist also counter-gifts. Ndjoleya, who as mother's brother received the bridewealth for Feliciana, gave a pig to Daniel, and it is customary for a pig to be given to the husband by his wife's father on the birth of their first child.[11]

The Umbundu word for marriage *oku kwela* is applied both to customary marriage and to Christian marriage. To distinguish between the two, Portuguese words are taken over, *amigar* (originally, to live in concubinage) being used for the customary marriage, and *casar* (to marry) being used for marriage in church. The use of *amigar* of a particular marriage implies that the people making it are pagans, or Christians who have omitted the church ceremony for one reason or another. In Gumba the church marriage, while it gives status among Christians is not an important occasion in the local milieu, and people who have been through the church marriage but who have not made the *wala*, the traditional wedding feast, are not permitted by their senior kin to cohabit. Around the mission the church ceremony is regarded as the important thing, and the *wala* seems to be thought of simply as a party. Traditionally and usually at the present day the *wala* is held in the dry season.

In the wedding feast there are a number of variations between one occasion and another, but a general outline can

[11] Hastings, p. 110, states that a year or two after the birth of the first child another pig is given which is called the pig of cutting off. The giving and the accepting of this severes all responsibilities between the families. The women can no more be returned to her father's people for misdemeanour—only in the case of the death of her husband will she be taken back.